



# Advancing the Knowledge of Public Health and Poverty in North Carolina through Oral History Interviews

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## Objective

Although several U.S. advances in public health began in North Carolina (NC), the state has long faced many social and physical challenges that contributed to a high incidence of disease. This is particularly true in the eastern and western counties which have been among the most rural and impoverished parts of the state. A regional public health supervisor conducted about 15 oral history interviews on audiocassettes with veteran NC public health workers from 1988 to 1995. He later donated his collection to East Carolina University's (ECU) Laupus Health Sciences Library, which serves the Brody School of Medicine's Department of Public Health. Soon, this department will become the School of Rural Public Health.

## Methods

These and other oral histories were examined for stories about challenges that contributed to disease and ways practitioners worked to improve public health.

## Conclusion

These oral histories and the results presented demonstrate people rising to the occasion with resiliency, flexibility, and creativity. An online exhibit based on this research will be developed in conjunction with the opening of ECU's School of Rural Public Health in 2020.

## Acknowledgements

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View our Oral History Collection: <https://lib.ecu.edu/ead/guide/LL02-03>

## Public Health Care Personnel Educated the Community about Preventative Care, 1950s-1970s

### Classes



Courtesy of Joyner Library, Daily Reflector Image Collection #741.

Photo of Dr. Andrew Best speaking to teachers at C.M. Eppes High School where he gave a seminar to "prepare the teachers in **health promotion, contagious diseases**, and above all sneak in the unit of **sex education**." Dr. Best had been teaching students at Eppes High School about contagious diseases since 1957, but the classes became so popular that "in '58, we branched out to all of the high schools or union schools in the county."

—Dr. Best on Pitt County, NC

"Two or three nights every week, I go talk to churches and groups about two basic things--**diet and exercise**."

—Dr. Sydney Barnwell  
on Craven County, NC

### Immunizations

"In 1954, believe it or not, we still saw **tetanus, diphtheria, typhoid fever, and tuberculosis**... they were the infectious diseases that we still had because everybody wasn't **immunized**."

—Dr. Earl Trevathan  
on Pitt County, NC



Child Getting a Polio Injection in Greenville, NC.  
Courtesy of Joyner Library, Daily Reflector Image Collection #741.

"After we got the **vaccine**... you'd put your name on the drug store list to get it... Pretty soon there was no **polio**, and we had to pass a law to make the mamas get the kids vaccinated to send them to school."

—Dr. Martin Hines on North Carolina

### Dental Health

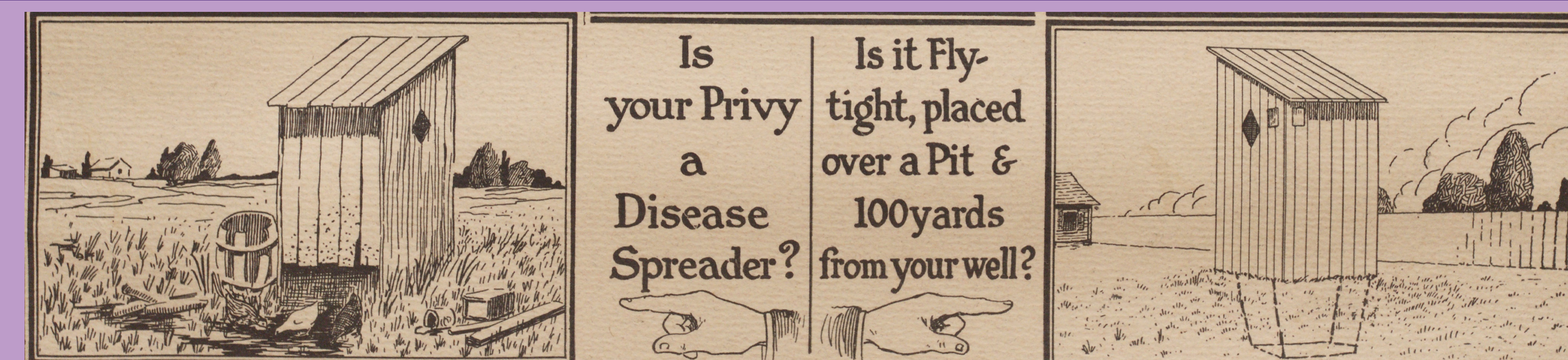
"There wasn't much fluoride. There wasn't much prevention of any kind... we [started] doing education on **diet control and brushing**... flossing hadn't even come in vogue yet."

—Dr. Richard Franklin Murphy on Texas AF base

"Unfortunately during that period of time we were extracting a lot of permanent teeth [from children]... What we used to refer to as **bombed out mouths**."

—Dr. George Dudney on North Carolina

### Sanitation



Reprint of "Clean Up" *The Health Bulletin*, 1917. Phoebe Pollitt Papers (LL02.73), Laupus Library.

"I have personally gone out with our environmental staff [to] **try to convince people that we need to get the privy off the creek** and do it in an acceptable manner because they sure didn't have all indoor plumbing... Solid waste disposal was with us in those days, and we didn't have a county wide collection system... that was a problem, a big time problem."

—Dr. Carl Tuttle on Northwest NC